

RHOTACISM IN ALAGOAS: A VARIATIONIST ANALYSIS

ROTACISMO EM ALAGOAS: UMA ANÁLISE VARIACIONISTA

ROTACIÓN EN ÁLAGOAS: UN ANÁLISIS VARIACIONISTA

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents an investigation on the phenomenon of rhotacism in Alagoas in the light of the theoretical-methodological assumptions of Variationist Sociolinguistics (LABOV, 2008). The objective is to analyze the process of rhotacism in Alagoas and the social and linguistic pressures involved in this process. Six hundred twenty-three susceptible occurrences of rhotacism are analyzed in interviews with 120 speakers from 5 cities of the state of Alagoas. It is noted that the schooling variable influences the performance of rhotacism, the less educated the speaker is, the more likely the presence of rhotacism, revealing a possible negative social valuation by the school. For linguistic variables, the previous context and the following context stand out, evidencing, respectively, that the performance of rhotacism is favored if the consonant preceded by /l/ is labial and if the vowel followed by /l/ is the low vowel.

KEYWORDS: Variationist Sociolinguistics. Alagoas. Rhotacism.

RESUMO: Investiga-se, neste trabalho, o fenômeno do rotacismo em Alagoas, à luz dos pressupostos teórico-metodológicos da Sociolinguística Variacionista (LABOV, 2008). Objetiva-se analisar o processo do rotacismo no estado de Alagoas e as pressões sociais e linguísticas envolvidas neste processo. Analisam-se 623 ocorrências suscetíveis de rotacismo em entrevistas de 120 falantes de 5 cidades alagoanas. Nota-se que a variável escolaridade influencia a realização do rotacismo, no sentido de que quanto menos escolarizado for o falante, mais favorecida é a realização do rotacismo, revelando uma possível valoração social negativa por parte da escola. Para as variáveis linguísticas, destaca-se o contexto anterior e o contexto seguinte, que mostrou, respectivamente, que a realização do rotacismo é favorecida se a consoante precedida de /l/ for labial e se a vogal seguida de /l/ for a vogal baixa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Sociolinguística Variacionista. Alagoas. Rotacismo.

RESUMEN: Este trabajo investiga el fenómeno de la rotación en Alagoas, a la luz de los supuestos teórico-metodológicos de la sociolingüística variacionista (LABOV, 2008). El objetivo es analizar el proceso de rotación en el estado de Alagoas y las presiones sociales y lingüísticas involucradas en este proceso. Se analizaron 623 ocurrencias susceptibles de rotación en entrevistas con 120

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ponentes de 5 ciudades de Alagoas. Se observa que la variable educación influye en el desempeño de la rotación, en el sentido de que cuanto menos educado es el hablante, más favorece el desempeño de la rotación, revelando una posible valoración social negativa por parte de la escuela. Para las variables lingüísticas, destacamos el contexto anterior y el contexto siguiente, que mostraron, respectivamente, que se favorece la realización de la rotación si la consonante precedida por /l/ es labial y si la vocal seguida de /l/ es la vocal baja.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sociolingüística Variacionista. Alagoas. rotación.

1 INTRODUCTION

The object of study of this work is the rhotacism phenomenon, characterized by the substitution of the consonant /l/ for the consonant /r/ in words such as: “planta ~ pranta,” “problema ~ probrema,” and “claro ~ craro.” The research investigates how rhotacism is produced in Alagoas and analyzes spontaneous speech data from speakers of five of the most important cities in the state: Arapiraca, Delmiro Gouveia, Maceió, Palmeira dos Índios, and Santana do Ipanema, distributed among the three mesoregions of Alagoas: Coast, Agreste, and Sertão.

Rhotacism is one of the most common linguistic phenomena in the Portuguese language and has appeared since the Latin language, through the Portuguese formation process. One can see how the Latin forms 'blandu,' 'clavu,' and 'plaga' were transformed into the Portuguese forms 'brando,' 'cravo,' and 'praga.' For Bagno (2015, p. 65), “the words had, in their origin, an obvious L that turned into R.”

Although the phenomenon of rhotacism is part of the history of the Portuguese language and is widespread in Brazil, it is still a stigmatized phenomenon, as reported by Costa (2011), constantly associated with speakers of lower social classes and levels of education. In Brazil, few studies address the phenomenon of rhotacism based on spontaneous speech data.

The work by Santos (2019), carried out in Capela/AL, is one of the first to research rhotacism in Alagoas. It indicates the phenomenon of rhotacism as a process with negative social valuation, produced by older people and favored by informants with less education.

Along this line, the research of Reis (2010), Costa (2007), and Tem (2010) indicate in their results the influence of schooling on the manifestation of rhotacism. Reis (2010), who investigates rhotacism in the state of Maranhão, confirms the importance of poor education in favoring rhotacism, noting that the normalizing action of the school can suppress the occurrence of the phenomenon. Costa (2007), in São José do Norte, Rio Grande Sul, finds similar results that indicate the prevalence of rhotacism in individuals with less schooling.

Studies by Tem (2010) in Rio de Janeiro found that schooling is a factor that influences the use of rhotacism, evidencing that individuals with a lower level of education tend to perform rhotacism more and individuals with higher education avoid the stigmatized forms, such as “pranta,” giving preference to more prestigious forms, such as “planta.” Thus, one of the hypotheses of this work is that rhotacism is in the process of change, giving way to the prestigious variants.

The guiding questions of this work are the following:

- a) Is the alternation between /l/ and /r/ socially motivated?
- b) How do the internal language factors act in the process of rhotacism?
- c) Is the phenomenon socially stigmatized in Alagoa's speech?
- d) Is there a process of linguistic change in progress?

To answer these questions, the theoretical-methodological assumptions of Variationist Sociolinguistics (LABOV, 2008) are adopted, which investigate linguistic and social factors in a correlated way, acting in the conditioning of variable linguistic processes, allowing to identify the social values that operate on the language.

The work will be organized into three sections: first, the **methodology** used will be addressed, and methodological procedures of data collection will be presented with the statistical treatment used. The second section is intended to analyze **the results** obtained through computer programs, presented in tables and graphs for a better interpretation. Finally, in the **Conclusion**, some considerations will be made about the results found, in addition to a synthesis regarding the phenomenon of rhotacism in Alagoas.

2 METHODOLOGY

In this study, the theoretical-methodological proposal of Variationist Sociolinguistics (LABOV, 2008) is used to analyze linguistic variation and change to investigate, in the state of Alagoas, rhotacism, characterized as the process of alternating consonants /l/ and /r/.

For the investigation, spontaneous speech data from subjects from Arapiraca, Delmiro Gouveia, Maceió, Palmeira dos Índios, and Santana do Ipanema are analyzed. Analyses are carried out to find the factors that interfere in the process of linguistic variation and change of this phenomenon. The research sample consisted of spontaneous speech data from 120 participants from the five cities analyzed and is part of the 'PORTAL - Português Alagoano' project database.

The selection criteria were: (1) having been born in the municipality, (2) not having been absent from the municipality for more than 10 years, and (3) having both parents also born in the municipality (preferably). The sampling used was non-probabilistic, in which the selection occurred through the indication of friends and acquaintances. Samples of each city were distributed considering the social variables gender (female and male), age (between 18 and 30 years old, between 40 and 55 years old, and over 65 years old), and schooling (less than 9 years and more than 11 years). It is important to note that, regardless of whether they were considered in the data collection as categorical variables, schooling and age were treated as continuous variables within a statistical model of multilevel logistic regression analysis.

The data that form the *corpus* of this research were collected through semi-structured interviews because, according to Labov (2008), the direct observation of the vernacular, the language used in real situations in face-to-face interaction, would be the primary method of linguistic investigation.

A TASCAM voice recorder, model DR-100, was used. The recordings were made in .WAV format, with a sampling rate of 24 *bits* and a resolution of 48kHz. The duration of the recordings averaged between 9 and 11 minutes.

The data were orthographically transcribed in the PRAAT *Software*, which allowed synchronization between audio and transcription. The intervals in the PRAAT were created due to the pauses (silence greater than or equal to 200ms). With this, 3 *tiers* were developed: for the documenter's speeches, for the participant's speech, and for 'others,' in which the speeches of people who were not included in the interview or other sounds would be recorded. The coding of the participants followed the reasoning: participant DE19M13 lives in the city of Delmiro Gouveia (DE), is 19 years old, is male (M), and has 13 years of schooling.

The occurrences were selected automatically, using text search features in PRAAT. All events were analyzed acoustically (with spectrograms and oscillograms) to classify the variants objectively.

The social variables investigated were gender (male or female), age, and schooling – analyzed as continuous variables –; and geographic location, the respondents belonged to cities in different regions of the state of Alagoas: Arapiraca, Delmiro Gouveia, Maceió, Palmeira dos Índios, Santana do Ipanema.

The linguistic variables investigated were: *syllabic context*, which refers to the position of the consonant cluster, distinguishing them into initial, medial, and final (**p**lanta, prob**l**ema, simpl**e**s); *previous context*, which deals with what precedes the variable in question, *labial* (b**í**blia, p**l**anejar, f**l**ores) or *dorsal*; *following context*, which concerns the height of the vowel after /l/, classifying them between *low vowel*, *middle vowel*, and *high vowel* (p**l**an**e**tário, simpl**e**s, b**l**oco, cl**u**be, cl**i**ma); and *stress*, which refers to the absence or presence of the accent in the syllabic context that contains the consonant /l/: stressed as in **C**láudia and unstressed as in **b**íblia.

For the quantitative analysis, the statistical analysis program R was used, in its integrated development platform *RStudio*, using the inferential method of multilevel logistic regression, which allowed the performance of the maximum likelihood ratio (TRMV) test of the Wald test (TW), and the Intraclass Coefficient Correlation (ICC).

The TRMV analyzes the statistical significance between independent variables, making it possible to verify the possible conditioning of statistically significant independent variables and rank them. From the TRMV, only the investigated variables within the confidence interval $\geq 95\%$ are kept in the final analysis model, that is, those that obtain Sig.TRMV equal to or less than 0.05.

The TW allows analysis of the statistical significance between factors within the independent variables, making it possible to find the factors that present statistically different effects from the mean of the impact of the elements on an independent variable (relative weight = 0.50). The significance of the TW assesses the probability of making an error by denying the null hypothesis, with the null hypothesis being true.

The Wald test null hypothesis refers to the effect of a factor on an independent variable being equal to the mean of the effects of the factors on that variable. The alternative view is that the effect of the same factor is different from the average of the effects of the elements. The lower the significance in the TW, the more significant the difference between the effect of a factor and the average of the effects of the factors. The TW allows checking whether the effect of an element is statistically different from a neutral effect.

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) test was also performed, assessing the agreement between the set of variable data. It is used to determine the validity of the investigated content. In the case of this research, the individual and the lexical item were analyzed from the CCI to assess how much of the conditioning of the dependent variable can be explained by the internal and external variables present in the final analysis model.

3 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In this section, the results obtained in the statistical analysis of the linguistic phenomenon of rhotacism will be presented, taking as the dependent variable the presence of the liquid consonant /l/ or its alternation with the simple occlusive /t/.

All occurrences in the complex attack environment were analyzed¹, formed by an obstruent plus a lateral – linguistic context of the rhotacism, in words like “planta ~ pranta,” “problema ~ probrema” – verifying 623 susceptible occurrences of rhotacism, distributed among the 5 cities, in Alagoas, taken as the *corpus* (Arapiraca, Delmiro Gouveia, Maceió, Palmeira dos Índios, and Santana do Ipanema).

Initially, the extralinguistic variables investigated were age, sex, education, and at the linguistic level syllabic context, previous context, following context, and stress. After applying the TRMV, only the external schooling variable and the internal variables previous context and following context were selected for the final analysis model.

¹ The complex attack is a characteristic consonant cluster in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). This cluster allows the combination CCV (consonant + consonant + vowel), as in **p**lanta or prato, with only the consonants /l/ and /r/ being able to occupy the second position in a complex attack (COLLISCHONN, 2006, p.36).

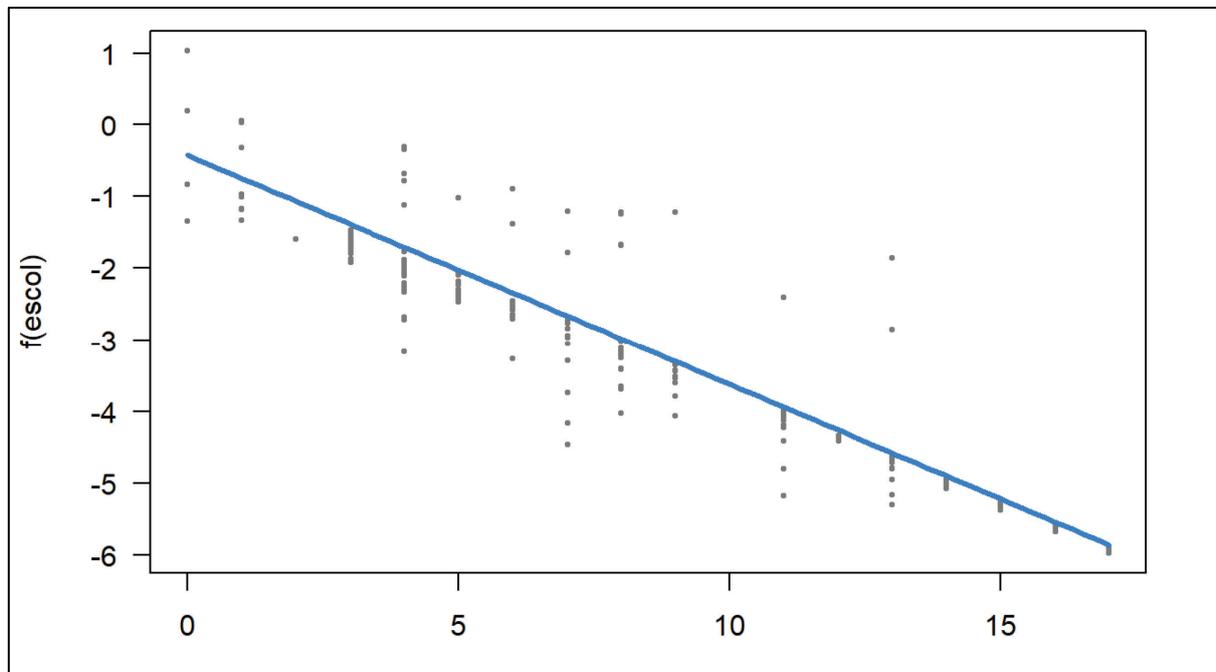
Table 1: Independent variables included in the final model (considered significant)

	Total	%Rhotacism	Relative Weight	Sig Wald	Sig TRMV
Education²	*	*	*	*	6.97e-07 ³
Total Previous					0.001
Dorsal	184	3.3%	0.14	0.019	*
Lip	439	9.8%	0.86	0.018	*
Total. Following					0.009
High vowel	203	2.5%	0.23	0.030	*
Low vowel	140	17.9%	0.76	0.031	*
Middle vowel	280	6.8%	0.51	0.927	*

Source: Author (2021)

The results obtained in the statistical analysis showed that only the variables schooling, previous context, and following context were favorable to rhotacism, as can be seen in Table 1 since they obtained Sig. TRMV less than 0.05.

The schooling variable proved to be significant as a conditioning factor for the process of rhotacism variation. As shown in Graph 1, there is a direct relationship between the schooling variable and the performance of rhotacism, evidencing that as the individual increases their level of schooling, the lower the chances of performing rhotacism.

Graphic 1: Effect of the schooling variable on the performance of rhotacism in Alagoas

Source: Author (2021)

² The schooling variable does not present percentages, relative weight, and Sig. Wald because it is a continuous variable, being analyzed through its linear distribution.

³ This notation means represents the number of zeros before the first decimal place.

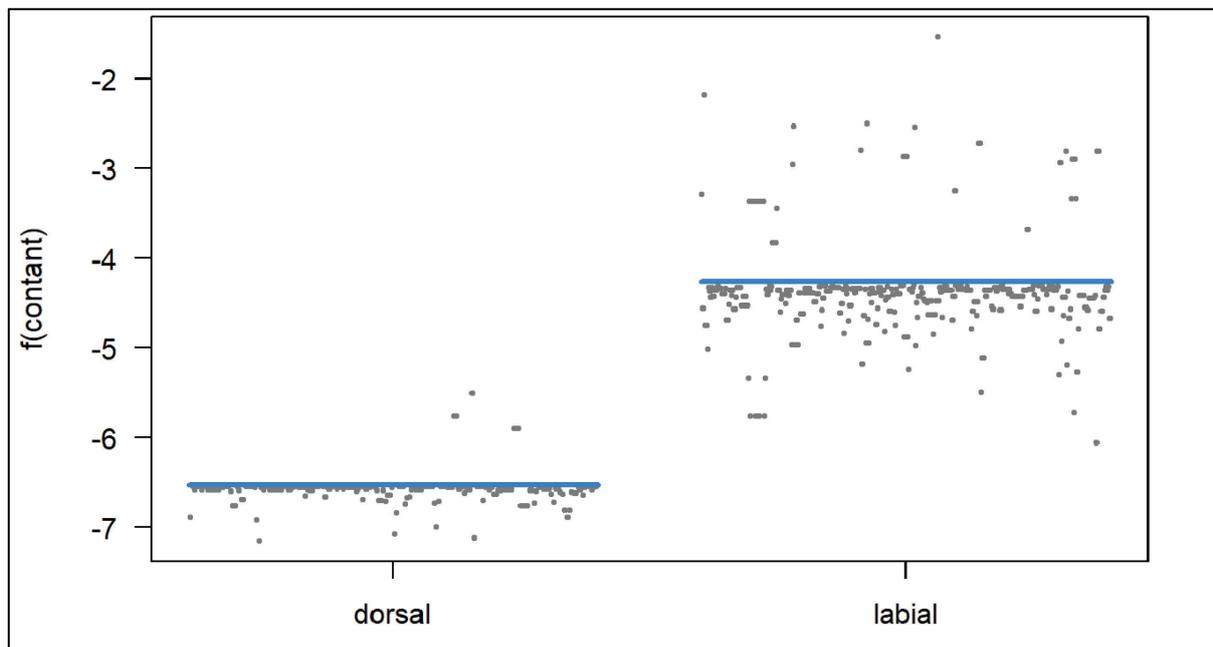
This result corroborates those found in other research, such as Palhano (2016), in the city of Quedas do Iguaçu, which brings in its results an application of 67% of rhotacism for informants with Elementary School and 33% for informants in High School, reinforcing the thesis that the level of schooling has a significant influence on the performance of rhotacism.

Costa (2006) in São José do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, also points out the schooling variable as significant in his research, with a percentage of application of rhotacism of 14% for informants with up to 4 years of schooling and 7% for informants with more than 4 years of study.

Results like these show two factors: 1) the school greatly influences individuals to use the prestigious forms, leaving aside the discredited forms; 2) the importance of the school in the formation of subjects who can notice the social valuation that falls on the different linguistic variants: “The stigmatized form is interpreted as inferior, in aesthetic and informative terms, by the members of the discursive community. Thus, the consensus is created regarding the stigmatized character of users of *framengo*, *problema*, and *homi*”. (VOTRE, 2004, p.52).

As for the previous context variable, the results indicate that labial consonants, as in linguistic forms such as “*planta*,” “*problema*,” and “*flor*,” behave as favoring rhotacism, to the detriment of dorsal ones of the type “*inclusive*” and “*clima*.” To demonstrate this, see the graph below that illustrates how the previous context variable was dispersed in the performance of rhotacism:

Graph 2: Previous context variable and performance of rhotacism.



Source: Author (2021)

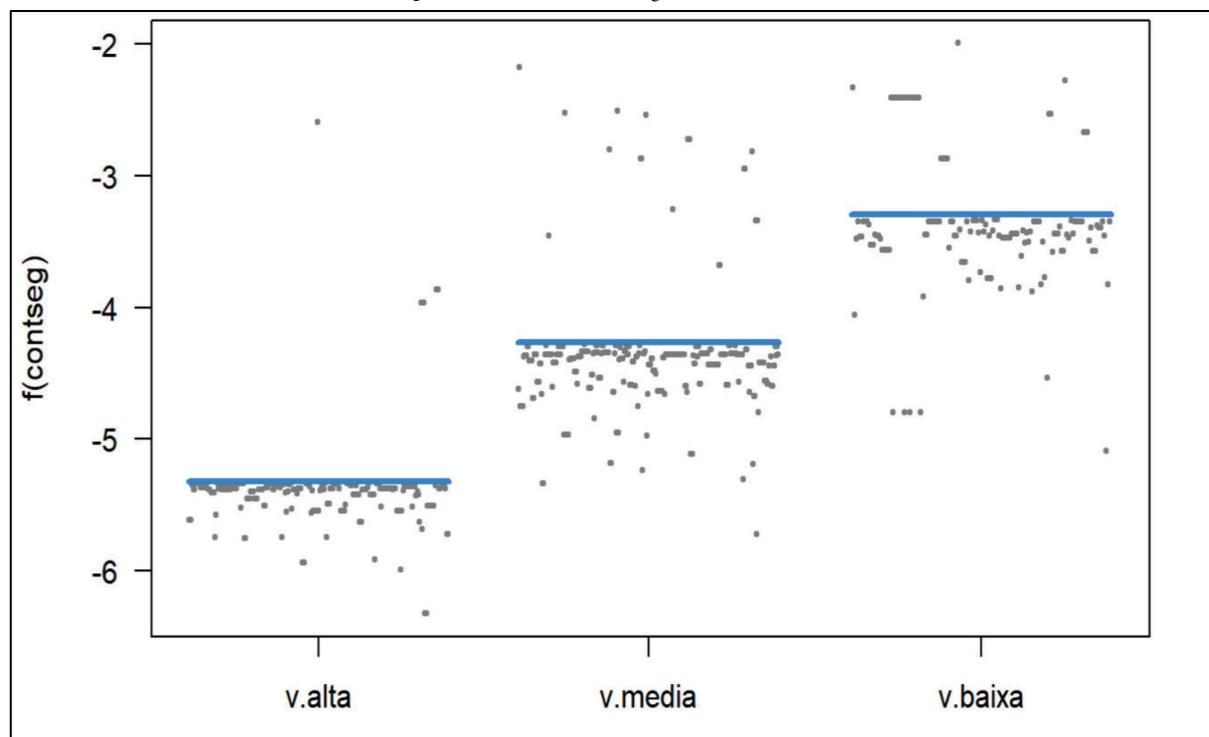
Labial consonants point to a high statistical significance index, not seen in dorsal consonants with a lower mean. The total realization values, percentages, and relative weights, presented in Table 1, indicate how labial consonants in a context before liquid consonants are related to favoring the rhotacism phenomenon.

The anterior context variable showed a relative weight of 0.86 for labials and 0.14 for dorsal ones, evidencing that the anterior context with a labial consonant is the environment that most favors rhotacism. In contrast, the previous context with a dorsal sound inhibits rhotacism.

The following context variable was also significant in the statistical analysis. For the following context, the vowel categories that occur after the lateral consonant were investigated, using the vowel height: low vowel ([a]), middle vowel ([e], [ɛ], [o], and [ɔ]); and

high vowel ([u] and [i]) in words like “[p]anta ~ [pr]anta,” “pro[bl]ema ~ pro[br]ema,” “in[kl]usive ~ in[kr]usive,” and “[kl]ima ~ [kr]ima.”

Graph 3: Effect of the following context on rhotacism



Source: Author (2021)

As can be seen, the low vowel presented positive conditioning in the following context, favoring rhotacism. The low vowel had a relative weight of 0.76, followed by the medium vowel with a relative weight of 0.51, ending with the high vowel, which had a relative weight of 0.23.

Considering the results of Sig.Wald, in table 1, it is noted that there is about 3% of possible variation in the relative weight value (up or down) regarding the low vowel and high vowel factors, which does not interfere in its linguistic conditioning since, regardless of this possible variation, the low vowel continues to have a relative weight of less than 0.5, disfavoring the rhotacism process. Likewise, the high vowel continues with a relative weight greater than 0.5, even if it fluctuates by 3%, favoring the variation process. On the other hand, with almost 93% of possible oscillation of the middle vowel's relative weight, it is impossible to guarantee any conditioning of this factor in the process of rhotacism variation, in Alagoas.

The results indicate a clear relationship between the vowel height of the following context and rhotacism, with the high vowel inhibiting the process, the middle vowel being neutral, and the low vowel favoring it.

Among the most aggregated variables analyzed from the CCI, the variable with the greatest significance was the individual variable (Table 2), indicating that a high percentage of variability (65%) can be attributed to the speaking individual and that somehow it was not controlled in the final model of this research.

In this sense, the ICC test makes it possible to determine the reliability of the analyzed data. It allows the verification of how much of the test can be explained by questions of the nature of the individual, or the language, which were not considered in the final analysis model. Since only the education variable – among the social variables – was kept in the final model, it means that the speaker's education explains 35% of the variable process. Still, it is possible that other external factors somehow interfere in the process of rhotacism variation.

Table 2: Aggregate random effect variables included in the final model

	n	Variance	ICC	Sig. TRMV
Individual	120	6.119	65.0%	2.2e-16 ⁴
lexical item	146	5.591e-10	1.7%	6.0e-05

Source: Author (2021)

The result for the lexical item variable, on the other hand, indicates that there is little of the linguistic nature not controlled by this research that interferes in the process of rhotacism variation, less than 2%. This suggests that the linguistic variables present in the final analysis model (previous context and following context) are sufficient to explain the linguistic conditioning of rhotacism in Alagoas.

After taking this route and entering the significant variables (education, previous context, next context), some considerations are made about the variables discarded in the final model.

Table 3: Independent variables discarded from the final model (no statistical significance)

	Total	% Rhotacism	Relative Weight	Sig Wald	Sig TRMV
Gender					0.09
Female	249	4.8%	*	*	
Male	374	9.9%	*	*	
Age⁵	*	*	*	*	0.29
City					0.12
Arapiraca	157	14%	*	*	
Delmiro	102	6.9%	*	*	
Maceió	227	12%	*	*	
Palmeira dos Índios	92	1%	*	*	
Santana	45	15%	*	*	
Cont. Syllabic					0.30
Final	144	3.5%	*	*	
Initial	181	11%	*	*	
Medial	298	8.1%	*	*	
Tonicity					0.78
Unstressed	278	5.8%	*	*	
Tonic	296	9.8%	*	*	

Source: Author (2021)

⁴ This value after e- indicates the number of decimal places in zero before the first digit of the expression.

⁵ The age variable does not present percentages because it is a continuous variable, being analyzed through its linear distribution

The tonicity of the segment did not favor the production of rhotacism, differently from the result obtained by Santos (2019) in Capela/AL, where this variable proved to be significant. In this study, the initial hypothesis was that tonicity would favor rhotacism, which was not confirmed, considering that the variable obtained a Sig value. TRMV above 0.05.

As shown in Table 3, the gender variable also did not show statistical significance. The male gender achieved 9.9%, a higher achievement value than the female gender with 4.8%. Gender is an essential variable in sociolinguistic studies and is associated with the construction of social roles interpreted by individuals. However, in Alagoas, it is impossible to identify the linguistic conditioning of rhotacism concerning the speaker's gender.

In the same way, the statistical analysis identified the age variable as not favorable to the rhotacism's performance. The informant's age is a rather complex variable in sociolinguistic research, as its distribution is naturally correlated with other aspects of a social nature.

In Costa's (2006) research, the informant's age favored rhotacism, showing that both the youngest and the oldest age groups perform the phenomenon. This result points to the opposite side of the pilot study carried out by Costa (2006), in which the younger age group was significant for the performance of rhotacism, showing a change in progress in the community of São José do Norte.

The non-conditioning of the age variable indicates that the process of rhotacism is stable in Alagoas because "when younger and older speakers use a variable, it means that it shows signs of stability, even more so if it is a variable as stigmatized as the rhotacism variable." (COSTA, 2006, p. 104).

The city variable also does not show statistical significance regarding the production of rhotacism in Alagoas. Although there was no uniformity in the percentage distribution of data, this variant had no linguistic conditioning for the study. Of the cities that form the *corpus* of this research, Santana obtained 15.6%, followed by Arapiraca, with 14%, Maceió, with 12%, Delmiro, with 6.9%, and Palmeira dos Índios, with 1%. Thus, it is possible to infer that Alagoas has a relatively uniform linguistic behavior regarding the performance of rhotacism, with no punctual distinctions within this speech community.

4 CONCLUSION

Of the social variables tested, schooling was the only one that proved to be a conditioning factor in the process of the rhotacism variation, revealing a possible negative social valuation on the part of the school. This is confirmed by the fact that the more the individual increases his level of schooling, the lower the chances of performing rhotacism.

Although it is not possible to categorically state, based on the results of this research, that the consonant resulting from the rhotacism process is a stigmatized variant in the state of Alagoas, it seems clear that it suffers some negative social valuation influenced by the school environment, which characterizes the process as a marker-type variation.

With the exclusion of the variables gender, age, and city from the final model, it is observed that the process of rhotacism is stable in Alagoas, not an expanding process. This is evidenced by the discarding of these social variables and by their production by speakers of all ages and genders. Thus, it can be said that the process of switching between /l/ and /r/ is not socially motivated (age and gender do not show conditioning in the process) and is in full swing.

Regarding linguistic conditioning, it is concluded that the phenomenon of rhotacism is influenced by the previous context preceded by a labial. In the same way, the following context following the low vowel acts positively in favoring rhotacism.

Finally, it is understood the need to carry out further research to deepen the discoveries about the social forces that interfere in the process of rhotacism in Alagoas, mainly because the CCI test indicated that there is still much of external nature - in addition to schooling, which was controlled in the final analysis model - which interferes in the process of linguistic variation.

Thus, it is essential to carry out new studies with the expansion of the *corpus* of analysis and the insertion of new social variables to resolve doubts about the forces that act on the process of rhotacism variation.

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